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FM AMEMBASSY CONAKRY  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0792  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RHMFSS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE//POLAD/J2/J5//

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 CONAKRY 000277

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/05/17  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [GV](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW GUINEAN PRIME MINISTER MUST STRIKE THE RIGHT  
BALANCE BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Classified by Ambassador Jackson McDonald. Reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) On March 2, the Ambassador met for the first time with newly appointed Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate. He said the U.S. will be as supportive as possible, if the new government is broad based and if it represents a distinct break with the corruption and cronyism of the past. He encouraged continuation of the political dialogue, prosecution of persons responsible for killings and other violent acts, and restoration of private radio stations. He also probed on the delicate question of how Kouyate plans to "manage" President Lansana Conte.

12. (C) Enthusiastic, energetic, but aware of the challenges before him, Prime Minister Kouyate provided good responses to all of the above points but shied away from discussing in detail his relationship with Conte. He spoke at length about his attachment to democratic values and, unlike many members of the governing elite, seems to realize that the voice of the people now counts in Guinea.

13. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate's first test will be the formation of a new government. He must meet popular demands for real change, while avoiding drawing fire from the old guard, who will not concede power and privilege without a fight. When choosing ministers, Kouyate must find the right balance between continuity and change. If there is not enough change, the people will take to the streets again; if he attempts the wholesale removal of the old guard, then they will work to undercut him. It remains to be seen whether he can pass this critical test.  
End summary.

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HEAD OF GOVERNMENT INSTALLED IN PRESIDENTIAL PALACE  
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14. (C) On March 2, the Ambassador met for the first time with recently appointed Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate. The meeting took place at the Sekoutoureya Palace, the modern, Chinese-built presidential palace that President Lansana Conte seldom uses. In a symbolic gesture, President Conte instructed his new prime minister/head of government to set up office at Sekoutoureya Palace rather than at the old, run-down prime ministry building.

15. (C) Unfortunately, Foreign Minister Mamady Conde (a card-carrying member of the old guard) and two note takers attended the first three-quarters of the meeting, a fact which at times inhibited discussion. The Ambassador was, however, able to raise some sensitive matters in a brief one-on-one discussion at the end of the meeting.

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U.S. WILL SUPPORT REAL CHANGE  
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16. (C) After congratulating Prime Minister Kouyate on his appointment, the Ambassador said that the U.S. will be as supportive as possible, if the new government is broad based and if it represents a distinct break with the corruption, cronyism, and ineffective governance of the past. He emphasized that the U.S. cannot support the continuation of bad governance. The Guinean people have demanded change, and they deserve it. He concluded that we

would judge the new government by its actions, not just its words.

17. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate responded, "I will be the first to tell you not to support us if we don't change our ways." He likened Guinea's arrested development to a hot air balloon tethered to the ground by ropes and weighted down by ballast. He said it was necessary to cut the ropes of bad governance and cast off the ballast of decades of ineffective government in order to allow the balloon to rise.

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DIALOGUE CONTINUES PRIOR TO FORMATION OF NEW GOVERNMENT  
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18. (C) The Ambassador noted that Kouyate had been named Prime Minister as the result of political dialogue; he encouraged him to continue this process of political dialogue as he forms his government and begins to tackle the many challenges facing Guinea.

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19. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate agreed, highlighting that he had already begun reaching out to others. He said he had visited the labor unions at their headquarters on March 1 and that he would meet with the civil-society umbrella association at its headquarters later on March 2. He said he would then begin visiting the headquarters of all major political parties. Only after completing these consultations would he compose his new government. Kouyate said he planned to announce the structure of the new government soon and then select the men and women to fill each ministerial position after broad consultations.

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THE GUILTY MUST BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE  
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10. (C) The Ambassador said that, as part of the national healing process, it was important not to let bygones be bygones. To the contrary, there must be credible investigations into the killing, wounding, and destruction of property associated with the general strike and the state of siege. Those responsible must be brought to justice and held accountable.

11. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate replied, "Impunity will not prevail." He said that the justice system must do its job -- "there will be no obstructionism from me." He commented that he had already met with the committee overseeing the investigations into crimes committed during the June 2006 and January-February 2007 strikes and state of siege. He had offered the committee moral and material support to complete its task.

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GOOD ELECTIONS BETTER THAN HASTY ELECTIONS  
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12. (C) The Ambassador asked how Prime Minister Kouyate planned to deal with the legislative elections which should, in principle, take place in June.

13. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate said that he wanted the next elections in Guinea to be the "most transparent in Africa." He said that he had not yet had time to take stock of where things stand with regard to preparations for the legislative elections. In a brief digression, he recalled his proposal as ECOWAS Executive Secretary for ECOWAS to maintain a regional inventory of electoral equipment -- everything from computers, to voter I.D. card machines, to ballot boxes -- and then to deploy them to each member state as needed.

14. (C) Returning to the legislative elections in Guinea, Kouyate said it would be better to have transparent elections as soon as technically feasible rather than rushing to hold elections in June without proper preparation.

15. (C) The Ambassador told Prime Minister Kouyate that the U.N., the European Commission, the U.S., and several other bilateral donors have already allocated funds to support the electoral process in Guinea but were frustrated by the tedious pace of preparations by the Ministry of Territorial Administration. He said that there was a consensus among the donors that it would be impossible to hold free, fair, transparent elections in June. He said he thought the U.S. would accept some slippage in dates in

order to allow time to prepare for the elections, as long as the elections were held before the end of the year.

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MEDIA LIBERALIZATION MUST CONTINUE  
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¶16. (C) The Ambassador noted that years of effort had led to private radio broadcasting in 2006. He regretted that Red Berets had destroyed some private radio studios, most notably Radio Liberte, and that the Ministry of Communications had pulled the plug on RFI. He emphasized the need for access to information in a democracy.

¶17. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate interrupted the meeting to convoke the Minister of Communications. He said he had already intended to order the minister to turn back on RFI on local FM. He recalled that, as representative of La Francophonie in Abidjan, he had advised President Gbagbo to do the same after the Ivoirian government had interrupted RFI broadcasts there. As for local private radio stations in Guinea, such as Radio Liberte, Kouyate said that the government should help defray the cost of getting them back

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on the air following the destruction of their equipment.

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"A NEW ERA MUST BEGIN"  
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¶18. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate said that his experience abroad, including in the U.S., had made him a true believer in democratic values and democratic practices, such as the right of the people to choose their government, separation of powers, and the right to information. He said that he wanted the new government to be as transparent as possible. For example, he would insist that government accounts -- both receipts and expenditures -- be published.

¶19. (C) The Ambassador said that the fundamental lesson from the general strike was that "the people count" for the first time in Guinea's history. Unfortunately, there are still some members of the old guard who simply cannot grasp that idea, who still believe in top-down rule, and who do not see the point of informing the people of what the government is doing, even when it does good things. For decades, the government's communications policy has been almost nonexistent, because the elite attach no importance to public opinion or world opinion.

¶20. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate replied, "A new era must begin" (Il faut qu'une nouvelle ere s'ouvre.) He said there is a "dialectical relationship" between those who govern and the people, who must give their consent. In the past, he said, Guineans suffered, fatalistically, through the Sekou Toure regime; Sekou Toure wanted to create "the new man," he only succeeded in "robotizing" the population. Now, Kouyate continued, the Guinean people have awakened -- slowly and tardily, but they have awakened; they are no longer willing to put up with economic deprivation; they are no longer willing to accept a government that does not have the people's consent.

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RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT CONTE  
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¶21. (C) During a brief on-on-one discussion, the Ambassador briefed Prime Minister Kouyate on the position the U.S. had taken during the general strike and state of siege: in short, President Conte is the problem, there is a leadership vacuum at the head-of-state level, and Guinea needs to address that problem head-on. The Ambassador summarized briefly his demarches to President of the National Assembly Aboubacar Sompore, President of the Supreme Court Lamine Sidime, and Chief of Defense Staff General Kerfalla Camara.

¶22. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate indicated that he was aware of our forward-leaning policy. He said that everyone must now acknowledge that Article 34 is not a viable option, because Sompore and Sidime do not have the courage to invoke it to remove Conte.

¶23. (S) Recounting his experience over recent weeks, Kouyate said that President Conte had told him on February 9 that he would be named Prime Minister and had asked him to return right away from Abidjan to Conakry. Before Kouyate could arrange a flight, however, something

happened, and Eugene Camara was appointed Prime Minister. Kouyate said he was flabbergasted. On February 10, Mrs. Kouyate called First Lady Henriette Conte, who was distressed to the point of being in tears over Eugene Camara's unexpected appointment.

¶24. (S) President Conte later called Kouyate in Abidjan, asking him to return to Conakry. Kouyate responded that he would be pleased to provide advice over the phone but that, since Conte had not named him Prime Minister as planned, he saw no reason to return right away to Guinea. Conte insisted, saying that he would greet Kouyate at the airport. Eventually, Kouyate returned to Conakry. Conte was not at the airport, but Kouyate was taken directly to the presidential palace. There, President Conte was accompanied by Prime Minister Eugene Camara and Foreign Minister Mamady Conde. President Conte asked Camara and Conde to brief Kouyate on the crisis and for Kouyate to recommend possible solutions.

¶25. (S) Camara, Conde, and Kouyate then went into another room, where the first two shared their analysis of the situation. Kouyate said he was aghast. Their analysis was wrong: they blamed the strike on (a) a Peuhl plot to takeover the presidency and (b) a plot by Fode Bangoura to seize power.

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¶26. (S) Kouyate thanked them and returned to see President Conte. He told Conte that the analysis provided by Eugene Camara and Mamady Conde was wrong. "If the doctor makes the wrong diagnosis, no amount of medicine will cure the patient," he argued.

¶27. (S) Conte asked what he should do. Kouyate recommended that Conte shorten his term in office and hold an early presidential election. Kouyate said that Sekou Toure's legacy was Guinea's independence from France, and that Lansana Conte's legacy was maintaining Guinea's territorial integrity despite the wars in neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone. Kouyate argued that if Guinea were to crumble -- and the danger existed since 30 out of 33 prefectures had been destroyed -- then Conte's legacy would be irredeemably ruined. Kouyate claimed that Conte took the point.

¶28. (S) The Ambassador asked how Kouyate, now that he is Prime Minister, plans to manage relations with President Conte and, especially, relations with Conte's family and cronies. Kouyate replied, "That's my affair; I think you will be surprised; President Conte has done everything to facilitate my task as Prime Minister."

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COMMENT  
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¶29. (C) Enthusiastic, self-confident, but aware of the challenges before him, Prime Minister Kouyate is a breath of fresh air. Unlike President Conte, he has a world view as well as a vision for Guinea. As he said in his acceptance speech on March 1, he wants to bring Guinea in to "perfect harmony" with the region and the world. He wants to end Guinea's five-decade-long isolation; he wants Guinea to join the modern world.

¶30. (C) Prime Minister Kouyate's first test will be the formation of a new government. He must meet popular demands for real change, without drawing fire from the old guard. Authoritarian regimes do not simply wither away and die. The hard-liners will not concede power and privilege without a fight.

¶32. (C) When choosing ministers, Kouyate must find the right balance between continuity and change. If there is not enough change, the people will take to the streets again; if he attempts the wholesale removal of the old guard, then the old guard will work to undercut him and to make him fail. It remains to be seen whether he can pass this critical test.

¶33. (C) We think that Prime Minister Kouyate may be underestimating the resistance he is likely to receive from the circle of greedy family members (e.g., the Second Lady) and business cronies (e.g., Mamadou Sylla and Guido Santullo) around Conte. Moreover, Prime Minister Kouyate will need to use all his political and diplomatic skills to manage President Conte's own practice of going in person to the customs office and the Central Bank to withdraw cash as

if from his personal account. No one has succeeded in ending this form of presidential bad governance in the past.

¶34. (C) The Guinean population is celebrating the turn of events as evidenced by the appointment of a "people's choice" Prime Minister. They even turned out in joyous welcome for the return of the ECOWAS delegation on March 2. They are giving Prime Minister Kouyate time to do this right, to select his government wisely. That said, they will not be patient with missteps. Kouyate must take their views into account.

MCDONALD